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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this essay is to compare the "strong-text" approach to literacy (which equates literacy with a tool for the representation of reality) with the approach that views literacy as involvement through the intersection of theory and practice. Theoretical expositions have limits placed on their explanatory power; the effort of this paper will be to exemplify what both theoretical approaches to literacy can look like in the context of second grade classrooms. Initially, the contextualization of method and scene will be discussed. Secondly, teaching strategies based on the strong-text teaching paradigm primarily focused on rules and structure will be displayed and critiqued. Third, a literacy as involvement teaching style will be exemplified as an improved alternative to the strong text approach. Contains 14 notes and 11 references. (Author/RS)

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RUNNING HEAD: LITERACY AS INVOLVEMENT

Student Paper

ED 474 584

"What's Wrong with Papa Bear's Chair?":

Toward Literacy as Involvement in the Second Grade Classroom

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Abstract

Deborah Brandt's 1990 groundbreaking book, Literacy as Involvement: The Acts of Writers, Readers, and Texts, conceptually illuminates many of the complexities surrounding multiple perspectives of defining literacy and approaching the act of teaching literacy in the classroom, Brandt highlights the assumptions behind the "strong-text" approach to literacy. From this perspective, literacy is equated as a tool for the representation of reality and "people become literate by coming to terms with the unique demands of alphabetic writing, a technology that forces radical interpretive shifts away from oral discourse habits" (Brandt 13). In contrast to the strong text approach, Brandt identifies an alternative perspective to conceptualizing literacy, seeking to teach literacy as an intersubjective relationship constructed through the complex interactions of encoding and decoding in context. In pursuit of literacy as involvement, Brandt deconstructs the received notion of an isolated student and claims that "the key knowledge for literate development is knowing about how people read and write, how they do the work of it. That knowledge is the crucial context that brings sense to written language" (Brandt 6).

The purpose of this essay is to continue to compare the strong-text approach to literacy with the approach that views literacy as involvement through the intersection of theory and practice. Theoretical expositions have limits placed on their explanatory power; the effort of this paper will be to exemplify what both theoretical approaches to literacy can look like in the context of second grade classrooms. Initially, the contextualization of method and scene will be discussed. Secondly, teaching strategies based on the strong-text teaching paradigm primarily focused on rules and structure will be displayed and critiqued. Third, a literacy as involvement teaching style will be exemplified as an improved alternative to the strong text approach.

"What's Wrong with Papa Bear's Chair?": Toward Literacy as Involvement in the Second Grade Classroom

Deborah Brandt's 1990 groundbreaking book, Literacy as Involvement: The Acts of Writers, Readers, and Texts, conceptually illuminates many of the complexities surrounding multiple perspectives of defining literacy and approaching the act of teaching literacy in the classroom. According to Brandt,

> To Ask "What is literacy?" is to ask, most of all, how literacy is to be understood. For some, literacy is a technology; for others, a cognitive consequence; for still others, a set of cultural relationships; yet for others, a part of the highest human impulse to think and rethink experience in place. Literacy is a complex phenomenon, making problems of perspective and definition inevitable. Literacy is also something of real value, making struggle around it unlikely to end (Brandt 1).

By synthesizing the work of "leading literacy theorists, including Jack Goody, Walter J. Ong, Deborah Tannen, and David R. Olson" (Brandt 13), Brandt highlights the assumptions behind the "strong-text" approach to literacy. From this perspective, literacy is equated as a tool for the representation of reality and "people become literate by coming to terms with the unique demands of alphabetic writing, a technology that forces radical interpretive shifts away from oral discourse habits" (Brandt 13). As a product of modernity[1], the strong-text approach dichotomizes literacy into a form/content binary and places the emphasis of learning on form. By over-emphasizing spelling, grammar, and punctuation, the strong text approach to literacy divorces

[1] Sharon Crowley provides the intended connotation of modernity, "Hegel identified the 'Idea' with objectivity, while the will and the passions were tied to subjectivity. And though it was the will of individuals-their interest in self-interest-that caused history to develop, nevertheless human history had always aimed toward the achievement of 'the realization of the Idea of Spirit…Reason governs the world, and has consequently governed its history'. Indeed, the privilege awarded to reason in the modern period was such that its claims to epistemological superiority far outweighed those of any other aspect of human capacity. This confidence in the ultimate ability of reason to solve

context from the written word and promotes a passive style of learning in which the received knowledge of reading and writing is stored separately from knowledge pertaining to "how people actually accomplish literate acts in daily life" (Brandt 1). In other words, learning literacy in school is objectively isolated from other learning experiences created by an oral relationship with context bound by language, culture, gender, family background, and identity.

In contrast to the strong text approach, Brandt identifies an alternative perspective to conceptualizing literacy, seeking to teach literacy as an intersubjective relationship constructed through the complex interactions of encoding and decoding in context. In pursuit of literacy as involvement, Brandt deconstructs the received notion of an isolated student and claims that "the key knowledge for literate development is knowing about how people read and write, how they do the work of it. That knowledge is the crucial context that brings sense to written language" (Brandt 6). In fact, Brandt claims that, "Theories of literacy based on the need for "decontextualization" of thought and language often justify instructional practices that may mislead struggling students, deflecting them from the very sorts of clues they need to figure out reading and writing (7). Through intersubjective literacy training, the literacy / orality binary is challenged, establishing a connection between learning in school and skills needed to negotiate the relationships encountered in everyday life. A context is provided and relationships become the catalysts for learning the process of reading and writing as opposed to the texts being analyzed alone in a vacuum. Lev Vygotsky explains that "the development of inner speech depends on outside factors; the development of logic in the child, as Piaget's studies have shown, is a direct function of his socialized speech. The child's intellectual growth is contingent on his mastering the social means of thought, that is, language" (94). Involving oneself with the

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human problems was responsible for the peculiarly modern notion of history as a record of ever-increasing human achievement." (6-7)

process of literacy revolves around being an independent thinker and learning the process of reading and writing in the context of social interaction by applying literacy skills to solve problems.

The purpose of this essay is to continue to compare the strong-text approach to literacy with the approach that views literacy as involvement through the intersection of theory and practice. Theoretical expositions have limits placed on their explanatory power; the effort of this paper will be to exemplify what both theoretical approaches to literacy can look like in the context of second grade classrooms. Initially, the contextualization of method and scene will be discussed. Secondly, teaching strategies based on the strong-text teaching paradigm primarily focused on rules and structure will be displayed and critiqued. Third, a literacy as involvement teaching style will be exemplified as an improved alternative to the strong text approach.

Situating Methodology with Scene

The exemplars used in this demonstration are the results of careful ethnographic observations and personal interviews of specific people in a certain time and place, therefore, the purpose is not to use the theoretical assumptions to be predictive, but descriptive in such a way that illustrates the advantages of the involved literacy strategies and the disadvantages of decontextualized literacy practices. The sample under observation is not a large sample and every class, whether in an elementary school, high school, or university will have a different ethos and varied means to accomplish the functioning of every day life; therefore, the purpose is not to generalize to a broader population but to describe some of the theoretical features of the different teaching styles that do show up in the observations.

The research design was planned during a discussion with the assistant director of the Oklahoma Educational Association (OEA)[2] who then initiated access with a couple of different school districts. The observations centered around two different classrooms. The first classroom was determined to be a strong-text based classroom[3] and was located at an inner city school in an industrial region. A couple of initial observations pertaining to the learning environment immediately became focal points in developing a research design. During the first visit, even prior to entering the building, evidence became apparent that the school contained at least a significant portion of students who were bilingual. The initial evidence was the fact that all of the signs around the building were printed in English and Spanish and the assertion from this evidence was later clarified during an interview with Ms. Emerson,[4]the teacher with the strong text philosophy, who verified that the school's population did indeed contain many bilingual students and some who only spoke Spanish. Additionally, the school is experiencing a severe resource shortage evidenced by the fact that some teachers at the school had to combine classes and team-teach due to a shortage of class rooms. In fact, Ms. Emerson, because of her seniority at the school, was given the option of team teaching or moving into a smaller classroom; she chose to move into a smaller class room because she did not want to worry about having differences of opinion with another teacher about the creation and organization of lesson plans.

The second class room was located at the same school as the first class room and the teacher's name is Ms. Waters. An assumption for this essay is that the external factors of the institutionalized learning environment are more or less similar to the first classroom. There is one notable difference however; Ms. Waters team teaches with Ms. Johnson. The collaboration

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[2] This research was funded by the Oklahoma Education Association in conjunction with a project to evaluate the Literacy First Process professional training development program.

[3] The reasoning for this determination will be explained in the next section of the paper.

in teaching undoubtedly alters the learning environment, yet, the alteration may be an early sign of the differences between literacy as involvement and the strong text approach. Remember that Ms. Emerson had the option of team teaching and rejected the notion. I'm not sure how Ms. Waters views team teaching and I'm not sure how Ms. Johnson views it either, but as will be explained later, cooperation is a useful exercise for involved learning and the team teaching might provide students with the metacommunicative exemplar of collaboration.

The research tools for ethnography do not depend upon surveys or any other form of precise statistical analyses but instead, they rely on intent observations and the accurate recording of the interpretation of observations which may come in many forms. One way to record observations is by taking highly detailed field notes. The use of field notes has advantages and disadvantages. A primary disadvantage is that the nonverbal communication and other visual aspects of the scene and the subjects can never be reproduced. Field notes could never record a rolling of the eyes or an exact gesture. However, the advantage is that the use of field notes allows the researcher to describe interpretations only available by being there. Another way to record observations is to use audio and video recordings also having advantages and disadvantages. The primary advantage is that recordings keep more of a concretized record of interaction allowing for the ability to watch and re-watch the scenario to perhaps notice patterns that were not noticeable during the one-time chance for observation. One disadvantage of using audio and video recordings is that a certain context or frame of reference can be lost in the time delay that occurs between the point of recording and the analysis of the data. Another disadvantage is that a video recorder can often be perceived as intrusive and intimidating

[4] Incidentally, all of the names of individuals have been changed to guarantee anonymity and the names of specific places have been withheld for the same reason.

resulting in the alteration of communication patterns of the subjects. Because of the issue of intrusiveness, the use of recording devices has not been utilized to this point in the observations.

Ethnography is not a method that utilizes the systematic testing of preconditioned hypotheses, in fact, "The feminist sociologist Shulamit Reinharz writes, "I will never know the experience of others, but I can know my own, and I can approximate theirs by entering their world. This approximation marks the tragic, perpetually inadequate aspect of social research (1984 p. 365)" (quoted in Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule 113). Ethnography "emphasizes encountering alien worlds and making sense of them[5]" (Agar 12). In other words, the ethnographer's role is to become familiar with a setting that was previously unfamiliar and then provide a thick description of experiences in that world. A thick description implies a description of the context under study as well as a discussion of how one became familiar with it. It is a meta-perspective which does not claim to be void of researcher biases, yet, if the researcher is aware of her biases, she will be more likely to avoid gross overgeneralizations[6]. As the ethnographer for this essay, I went through many emotional ups and downs as I witnessed magic in the classroom on the same day and in the same class that I witnessed loneliness and isolation. During the portrayal of observations, magic mostly appears in the classrooms that I

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[5] See also bell hooks quoting James Clifford and George Marcus, eds. Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography, "Ethnography is actively situated between powerful systems of meaning. It poses its questions at the boundaries of civilizations, cultures, classes, races, and genders. Ethnography decodes and recodes, telling the grounds of collective order and diversity, inclusion and exclusion. It describes processes of innovation and structuration, and is itself part of these processes. Ethnography is an emergent interdisciplinary phenomenon. Its authority and rhetoric have spread to many fields where "culture" is a newly problematic object of description and critique..." (330)

[6] Linda Brodkey claims that "Critical narrators, then are narrators whose self-consciousness about ideology makes it necessary for them to point out that all stories, including their own, are told from a vantage point, and to call attention to the voice in which the story is being told. In critical narratives, it is from the narrative stance or conceptual vantage point of critical theory that a story of cultural hegemony is generated. That means that the events related have been conceptualized by a narrator who sees, organizes, interprets, and narrates social events in terms of critical theory. Where another ethnographer might "see" a particular social event as worth relating because it illustrates how conflict was resolved or provides an interesting case for a discourse analysis of language interaction in a classroom, the critical ethnographer will consider an event worth recording and reporting because it exemplifies a hegemonic practice. (109-110)

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identify as the involved literacy class and the loneliness and isolation mostly appears in the class that I identify as the strong-text class; however, none of the classes observed were purely strong text. All the teachers who were observed, without question, exemplified a deep seeded concern for the students in their classes; and concern, in my opinion, is a main ingredient to being a connected and involved teacher. Yet, there is a clear difference in teaching style from classroom to classroom and those differences in teaching style, according to the theoretical parameters of the observations, are associated with more or less involvement in the classroom and therefore, imply that more or less active learning is happening in each observational context. This paper will provide snap shots of the different teaching styles in action to promote literacy as involvement as an overall superior perspective to the strong-text approach.

The "Strong-Text" Teaching Paradigm: A Received Way of Knowing

As stated earlier, Ms. Emerson's classroom was identified as having the strong-text approach to literacy prior to the beginning of observations by the assistant director of the OEA and it did not take much time to begin to internalize why the class room was identified as such. During a pre-observation informal interview[7], Ms. Emerson voluntarily calls attention to her "traditional" teaching style; she argues that the "new teachers" operate from a "laissez faire" teaching paradigm and do not expect as much out of their students as she does. She provides a generalized example as demonstration, "The new teachers read to students and they ask the questions," whereas "the older teachers have students read to them and teachers ask the questions." The differentiation reveals a basic distinction in attitude between two different styles of teaching; Ms. Emerson's attitude places most of the authority in the classroom with the text

[7] Interview with Ms. Emerson on 1/12/01. The main purpose of the interview was to introduce myself, meet Ms. Emerson, and become acquainted with the classroom environment. The interview took place during her planning period; thus, no students were present. This gave me the chance to ask Ms. Emerson for a recommendation on where to situate myself during observations to avoid becoming an obstacle to learning.

and the teacher whereas the "new teachers," according to Ms. Emerson, place the authority in the students' ability to come up with their own questions about reading. Ms. Emerson relates a philosophy of teaching that Brandt claims promotes the autonomy of the text that is one of the key assumptions underlying strong-text literacy.

While entering the classroom on the first day of observation[8], the teacher is at the chalk board in the process of diagramming a blank chart to be filled in by the students which includes the following categories: title (which was already filled in with "Joboti Plays His Flute"), characters, problem, and events. After diagramming the chart on the board, the teacher instructs the class to "open your reading workbook to page seven." Following the length of time it takes second graders to open their workbooks, stop moving, and settle down, the teacher starts reading "Joboti Plays His Flute" out loud to the class. Upon finishing the story, the teacher asks the class who the characters in the story are and two students raise their hands, the teacher calls on one of the students who supplies a correct answer. The teacher continues to probe the class to name other characters in the story and the same two students keep raising their hands; eventually, Ms. Emerson calls on students who are not raising their hands and they give her the wrong answers.

Finally, as if giving up, the teacher says, "get ready to write," to the class and gives them just enough time to turn their work books to page eight and then she begins to ask the same questions pertaining to the characters; only this time, the students are not providing the answers but the teacher is writing them on the chalk board inside the portion of the chart labeled "characters." Instantaneously, a couple of students begin copying the words; when the teacher says "now be sure and copy, you'll have to finish this," even more of the students begin copying the words from the board into their work books and the teacher starts walking around the room to

[8] The first day of observation is on 1/16/01.

check answers. A couple of the responses are, "good job," but many of the responses are more along the lines of, "no, it's right up there on the board," or "you need to start writing on your own." Following individual interaction with individual students in isolation, the teacher turns to the class and asks, "What are the problems?;" and without hesitation to give anyone an opportunity to answer the question, she writes the problems on the board. The lecture continues until the teacher decides to start reading groups and announces that "we are going to do half of the events and you'll do the other half and the solutions on your own." Skipping ahead a little to when the reading groups are over, the teacher comes back to the board and meticulously fills in the rest of the chart and wanders around to each desk to make sure that each student is copying it correctly.

By the time this exercise ends, the students in the class know that the characters in "Joboti Plays His Flute" are Joboti, the turtle, the hunter, the hunter's children, they know that the problem is that the children didn't know what to do with Jaboti, and they also know the events and the solutions in the story. Of all the things that they do know about the book, the one concept that they have not learned is how to interact with it through interpretation, evaluation, or application; all they have learned are facts about the story. Brandt defines this as a problem related to the objectified text as autonomous:

> Autonomy relates to the sheer mundane materiality of written language. Written language can be called autonomous because it can be differentiated as an entity in the world. It can be called autonomous because it exists, as inscription, independently from the physical presence and even living existence of its author. Autonomous written language can last longer than its author and longer than any particular reader. Its potential resides in its permanent outline on a page. (23)

In other words, because the text is used autonomously in such a way that views knowledge as objective and revolves around the determination of correctness or incorrectness; whether the students can remember the characters of the story or not is given more importance than processing the story through an in depth, question and answer relationship with the text. The exercise trains the students to absorb information without the experience of applying literacy skills to solve problems. Students may, or may not know who the characters are in "Joboti Plays His Flute, but they certainly have not had the experience of becoming involved with the story by actively approaching application and therefore, have missed an important aspect of education, learning how to learn. The focus of this type of learning views literacy as simply a technical skill which Brian Street argues is "'telling out of context rather than showing in context'"(ibid.) (21).

According to Belenky et. Al., this exercise activates a received way of knowing in which the knowers[9] "either 'get' an idea right away or they do not get it at all. They don't really try to *understand* the idea. They have no notion, really, of understanding as a process taking place over time and demanding the exercise of reason. They do not develop opinions. Facts are true; opinions don't count." (42).

Evaluation and The Received Way Of Knowing: An Invitation to Silence

The critique of the previous exercise does not imply that received knowledge is never useful; in fact, it is quite important, yet, without the internalization of the knowledge through the experience of hearing others talk about the internalization process, the knowledge remains autonomous. With a strong text teaching philosophy, the students are not provided the meta-perspective to knowledge via the learning process only available through social experience

[9] In this particular instance, the authors were referring specifically to "women" as received knowers; I am intending to imply that the explanation is especially descriptive of "humans" as received knowers.

because the strong-text approach to literacy cycles through the lesson plans in this classroom. For instance, following the previous exercise, the teacher transitions the class into a small reading group exercise and half the class, about five or six people, move to a U shaped table away from the desks. The transition itself is interesting to observe; it begins by Ms. Emerson saying, "O.K. it's Tuesday so group number one reads first." As soon as she says those words, the class shifts gears: group number one discards one book, grabs another, and makes their way to the "reading table;" while group number two continues to write down characters, events, problems, and solutions from "Joboti Plays His Flute." The transition is automatic and built into the class as a lesson of structure and following directions, which is an important lesson, but the mode of learning that Ms. Emerson is transitioning into is a similar type of learning in which the either/or type of knowledge again becomes the goal of learning, except at the reading table, students are questioned individually and the evaluation of learning becomes more of an emphasis.

The reading table is a U shaped table and the students are all situated around the outside edge of the table; Ms. Emerson sits inside the open faced head of the table. The teacher begins by saying "we've been reading 'Little Red Riding Hood', let's see, whose turn is it to read? Alex, it's your turn." Alex reads from the text and seems like a fluent reader for his age group[10]; from time to time however, he needs help with a word and Ms. Emerson provides the assistance. After a few sentences, the next person reads, seems fluent, but needs a little more assistance than the first person. The process continues around the table in a similar fashion until we get to Javier who needs help with almost every word that he tries to read, and Ms. Emerson is quick to supply the answer. Javier struggles with word after word and because this type of interaction with

[10] I do not have any expert knowledge to lead to this conclusion; this was my first impression.

Javier, happens everyday; he became a focal point for my observations. A week later when the class was reading "Three Little Bears," Javier repeatedly needs help with pronouns such as "I" and "He[11]" two or three times in the same paragraph and again, every word becomes a point of frustration. After the students all read one time, they go around the table again in similar fashion and when finished, Ms. Emerson begins a question and answer session concerning the plot of "Three Little Bears." The first question went to Javier, "What did they eat?," Javier responded by saying, "Beans;" and for the first time since my observations started, Javier said something that was not "wrong." After asking a couple of other students questions and nearing the end of the reading group, Ms. Emerson comes back to Javier hoping to build on the previously established momentum and asks him the last question of the session; "What was wrong with Papa Bear's chair?" Javier responded with, "It was too hot;" and immediately the reading group realizes that Javier had answered the wrong question and burst into laughter; even Ms. Emerson chuckles momentarily.

When the laughter subsides, Ms. Emerson concludes group number one by saying, "Tomorrow, we're going to find out what happened. You two can go (pointing to two students who were corrected the least by the teacher), I'm going to give you two a tab[12] (pointing to Javier and another student who seemed to be corrected quite a bit)." Group number one leaves the table, Javier and the other tab recipient stay behind to accept their evaluation, and group number two comes to the reading table for the same exercise. Similar patterns emerge in group number two and two students receive a tab after their group has finished. Immediately after group number

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[11] These particular pronoun exemplars comes from observations on 1/23/01 during the reading of "Three Little Bears," but speaks to the general frustration Alex appears to be experiencing in the exercise, regardless of what story is being read on any particular day.

[12] I learned on 1/23/01 that the tabs indicate a special homework assignment in which the students who receive them are required to go home and read to a family member.

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two leaves the table, all of the tab recipients come back to the table to re-read what they had just finished to provide the same "wrong" answers to the same factual type of questions.

Much like the first exercise, the reading group revolves around either/or knowledge and the focus is on form (elements of the plot) and not as much on content (interpretations of the story). The learning concerns an autonomous text isolated in a particular time and place as an objective source of information. The difference between the two exercises is that in the reading group, students are isolated and individually labeled "right" or "wrong" and in Javier's scenario in particular, the label is usually "wrong". Aside from the inherent evaluation and traumatic humiliation of being wrong a majority of the time, at the end of the session, Javier is assured of this impression when the teacher gives him a tab. Javier is also assured of his "inadequacy" when on the first day of observations, when the class finishes the reading lesson and lining up to go to lunch, the teacher explains to me why reading was such a frustration for some students in the class and Javier in particular. She approaches me and out of curiosity asks what I thought about the class so far. I reply that "I am amazed at how much work you do while walking around to each individual student to check their work." She responds, " Yeah, it's a lot of work; reading is the toughest subject school wide because so many kids are bilingual. For instance, you might have noticed that Javier (points him out from across the room) really struggles because he does not speak English very well." I am not sure if Javier heard the explicit evaluation or not, regardless, I do know that other students heard it and could not help but internalize it with a specific attitude toward Javier. The evaluation continually shows up in Javier's school life; Linda Brodkey describes an emotional response similar to what Javier must experience on a daily basis:

> Remember the anger you feel when someone corrects your pronunciation or grammar while you are in the throes of an argument and you can recover the traces of the betrayal

> students must experience when a writing assignment promises them seemingly unlimited possibilities for expression and the response or evaluation notes only their limitations. (89)

While Brodkey is describing a private interaction between a teacher and a student on a writing assignment, the same type of evaluation is occurring for Javier in public interaction. Day after day, Javier is repeatedly isolated in a "narrative of irreconcilable alienation, a vicarious narrative told by an outsider who observes rather than witnesses life" (Brodkey 61). Because of the evaluation, Javier is encouraged to not say anything, to remain silent. Belenky et al. write:

> We believe that individuals grow up to see themselves as "deaf and dumb" when they are raised in profound isolation under the most demeaning circumstances, not because of their genetic intellectual endowment. That anyone emerges from their childhood years with so little confidence in their meaning-making and their meaning-sharing abilities...signals the failure of the community to receive all of those entrusted into its care. (34)

In this classroom, Javier only attempts to speak when he is spoken to and unfortunately, the experiences of him speaking that I observe, seem to be highly negative.

Cooperation and Invention in the Involved Classroom: A Step Towards Breaking the Silence

As a critical ethnography, the exemplars previously mentioned are examples of travesty; they are isolated examples of failure in the classroom reified over and over again through the life cycle of the semester. Yet, it is only fair to point out that there is some positive learning activity in this class; for instance; at least two or three students out of a class of twelve repeatedly raise their hands in excitement over the chance to answer a question. Another example is that at least

over half the class, according to my novice estimations, seem to be functionally literate as demonstrated by only an occasional correction during the reading group exercise. Some students are learning functional literacy skills, the skills are forms of either / or knowledge and are taught out of the context of an every day experience while other students are learning that it is easier to be "deaf and dumb." The teaching philosophy does not teach to the "zone of proximal development," defined by Vygotsky as 'the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem-solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Hillocks 55).

The goal of viewing literacy as involvement is grounded in the idea that teachers should teach up to students' abilities and challenge their horizons as a learner in order to allow them to work out the solutions to problems with the assistance of others. Instead, in Ms. Emerson's class, the students are isolated and asked questions that have right and wrong answers; if they answer them correctly then the knowledge is "absorbed" and the class moves on and if they answer the questions incorrectly, then the class stops while everyone observes the student struggling to come up with the right answer. In isolation, students' frustrations can become traumatically embarrassing whereas if the students work in context with other people, they internalize different ways of approaching obstacles and perhaps feel a sense of empowerment for being a part of the solution or at least share the blame if the solution is not found.

On the first day of observations in Ms. Water's class[13], collaborative learning is put on display as an involved approach to literacy. Upon my entry into the class room, Ms. Waters has everyone leave their desks to sit on the carpeted area next to the chalk board. Of course it takes a

couple of minutes for twenty six second graders to accomplish this task, but as soon as they do, they become involved with the lesson when Ms. Waters begins by asking, "Who wants to write a fairy tale?" Only a few students raise their hands until Ms. Waters says, "Oh come on, we've been reading them, you can all write a fairy tale;" then at this point, every student has their hands raised and some were even "ooing" and "aahing." "O.K., what are the elements in fairy tales?," asks Ms. Waters, as she was preparing to write them on the board. Instantly, students start raising hands to be called on. Six of the students in the class are called on during this segment of the activity and none of them are wrong because all of the ideas make their way to the board. Through collaboration, the class decides that the elements of fairy tales are: title, beginning-middle-end, magic, capital letters and punctuation, setting, and characters. All of the answers come from the students and the students can see the results of their thinking up on the chalk board. After the elements of the fairy tale are decided, the teacher probes the class even further by asking, "What kind of characters?" Again, hands spring into the air and the teacher begins calling on people while writing the responses on the board: Goldilocks, fairy, witch, ogres, elf, little man, queen, king, princes, princess...etc. In all, about twelve students contribute to answering the question and none of them are wrong. The next question was, "What do fairy tales do?," and one student raises his hand and says," teach us a lesson." The teacher replied, "What kind of lesson?" (as she wrote "lesson" on the board), the student responded, "to keep our promises." The teacher said "YES, and we're all going to write our own fairy tales."

Up to this point in the exercise, the teacher has led a discussion over the form of a fairy tale and while it was guided in particular directions by the teacher, there was never an occasion for a student to feel "right" or "wrong," they were simply left with the feeling that they

[13] The observations were on 2/6/01. This class is team taught with Ms. Johnson who is generally not present in the reading class. Due to the fact that there are 26 students in the class; at first, I thought that this would be too many

contributed to the class discussion. The learning environment has been created in such a way that evaluation and fear is less of an issue than training in collaboration and invention.

"Relying as it did on notions about knowledge as possessed in common by all members of a community, ancient inventional theory was viable as long as rhetoric was defined as the art that studied the generation and reception of effective public discourse" (Crowley 4), and was studied in much the same way until the 18th century when faculty psychology and associationism, products of modernity, began to affect the study of invention. Sharon Crowley explains invention in the current traditional paradigm[14] (CurTrad):

> Unlike classical or medieval rhetoricians, the modern discourse theorists assumed the existence of an individual ordering consciousness that was always in touch both with nature and with its own operations and that was not necessarily constrained by community expectations. This originating consciousness manipulated its "ideas," which represented either the things of the world, related ideas, or propositions. The stuff of invention—subjects, ideas, knowledge, discoveries, and thoughts, as well as aims or intentions—preceded discourse; it existed in some coherent and knowable way prior to and outside of discourse. (16)

The strong text approach views the individual as autonomous, a property of "modern discourse" and therefore, overlooks imagination and interpretation as parts of invention. But when we look at Ms. Waters' class, we see a challenge to the current traditional paradigm in which individuals'

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students for one teacher. However, Ms. Waters found ways to keep everyone busy.

[14] Kathleen Welch also describes the effect of modernity on rhetoric and composition studies: "During all the seven hundred years of the emergence of rhetoric in the classical period, rhetoric as a faculty, or an ability, formed one of its centers. Disregarding rhetoric as a faculty has been diminished since the Middle Ages but found its most serious diminishment with the rise of scientism and Cartesian rationalism. The ability to do something became radically subordinated to whatness, or "content." This situation persists into the late twentieth century and accounts for many of the peculiar appropriations of classical rhetoric that we see and read all around us. Many aspects of rhetoric and composition have sunk into a swamp of content devoid of their functions as faculties or abilities. Rhetoric and composition without their vital functions as faculties ultimately become trivial and boring." (93-94).

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interpretations are valid and legitimate despite the fact that they are different from each other. Particularly, looking back at the previous dialogue when the students were coming up with the elements of fairy tales, a student mentioned punctuation as one. While that is probably not exactly what the teacher had in mind, as it is not a defining feature of a fairy tale, she includes this idea into the invention process by writing it on the chalkboard and perhaps even more importantly, she allows the class to see the student as an authority.

Another observation about the opening exercise pertains to the cooperative learning in this class. Brandt claims that cooperation allows individuals to share not just the content of discussion with each other but the process of internalization used to come to a conclusion about the content. The students learn how to learn by being exposed to a variety of paradigms used to solve problems. According to Lunsford and Ede, "The cooperative learning movement has amassed large amounts of empirical data to support the claim that the strategies and principles they espouse really do enhance learning" (116). In fact, they quote a study by "Johnson and Johnson, of the University of Minnesota Cooperative Learning Center," that outlines the advantages of cooperative learning:

1. higher achievement and increased retention
2. Greater use of higher level reasoning strategies and increased critical reasoning competencies
3. greater ability to view situations from others' perspectives
4. more positive attitudes toward school, learning, and teachers
5. higher self esteem
6. greater collaborative skills and attitudes necessary for working effectively with others (Learning 9) (117)

Much like the strong text teacher's tendency to reify autonomy over and over again in the course of a class period, the involved teacher carries her attitude over into each lesson as well.

Immediately following the question and answer session, the teacher says, "O.K. we're all going to write our own fairy tales," and then she gives a story sequence chart to every student, and tells them that "today, think of characters and setting and then tomorrow during the writing workshop, we might add to it." The invention in this exercise is building upon the group discussion of ideas, content, and format of fairy tales while teaching at the zone of proximal development through teacher-student and student –student cooperation making it less likely to become caught up in what Kathleen Welch calls a "swamp of content devoid of their functions as faculties or abilities" because without their "vital functions as faculties," rhetoric and composition becomes "trivial and boring." (94).

From beginning to end, the lesson for the day continues to develop by integrating each skill while focusing on form and content at the same time. In the next step, students sit down at their desks and while writing, the teacher begins to talk to each student individually and appears to intend to go to each desk, but students keep approaching her before she could change location in the classroom. This level of involvement was never observed in Ms. Emerson's class. Examples of interaction include one example when the teacher is looking at a student's story sequence chart and says, "What's the subject and verb?," the student replied that "it doesn't have one," and the teacher concluded the interaction with, "well then it's not a complete sentence, is it?" "What's the solution?" and "What I really want is for you to think of a when and where in the setting," are other comments made by the teacher to different students. The atmosphere created in the classroom allows comments to be taken more as constructive criticism and less of an either/or, right or wrong binary, if for no other reason than the fact that the comment is made

individually without the stigma of comparison inherent to a public evaluation. The assignment continues into two or three more segments switching between an independent and cooperative mode of learning while integrating both at the same time and demonstrating the metacommunication of bridging the form/content binary.

Conclusion

This is a critical ethnography that very much fits within its genre. The observations made in Ms. Emerson's class are difficult to report because I like her so much; it is important to remember that the difference between the two teachers is not skill or experience, in fact, Ms. Emerson has been teaching for 32 years while this is Ms. Waters' first year; therefore, I would argue that Ms. Emerson is more skilled at her style of teaching than Ms. Waters is with hers. However, the teaching style is more than a teaching strategy but it is a paradigm, a way of knowing that seeps into every aspect of the teacher-student relationship. In one paradigm, the teacher is the hierarchical authority with an autonomous form of knowledge that solidifies her role as leader; in the other style, the teacher's relationship of authority with the student is less hierarchical and more encouraging. The two paradigms are completely different and clearly, when comparing the way the paradigms appear in the classrooms specifically observed in this study, the involved teaching paradigm encourages more interactive learning, teaches to a wider zone of proximal development for each student, and invites more students to the conversation. Through a more classical use of the rhetorical canon of invention and the interchange of ideas with an emphasis on cooperative learning, the literacy as involvement classroom integrates content and form in search of a balanced approach to primary education and a means to establishing a link between school and the problem solving capabilities necessary in everyday life.

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